

MEDIA RELEASE

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Howard's Dead Hand of Paternalism

The decision by Prime Minister Howard to abolish ATSIC and move responsibility back to mainstream departments would be a massive backwards step", Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), said today.

"Today marks a return to the dead hand of paternalism under which Indigenous disadvantage and marginalisation flourished", ANTaR National President, Phil Glendenning said.

"This Government seeks to hide its own failure by scapegoating ATSIC but the truth is it has always bitterly opposed ATSIC and the concept of self-determination.

"Theirs is an ideological position that no amount of evidence to the contrary will change.

"It has been widely acknowledged that ATSIC required reform, however the Government's own review process did not recommend abolishing Indigenous representation.

"Evidence has shown that full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strengthening of Indigenous organisations and accountability of mainstream departments are critical issues in tackling Indigenous disadvantage. None of these pre-conditions has yet been achieved in this country, including in relation to ATSIC.

"In reality, this government and its mainstream departments and agencies have massively failed Indigenous Australians.

"Nearly 60% of federal funding for Indigenous programs and the vast majority of state and territory funding, including in the crucial areas of health, housing and education, is administered by mainstream departments, not ATSIC.

"Indigenous disadvantage has worsened under Howard's 'practical' reconciliation policies.

"We call on Labor, the Democrats and Greens to oppose any legislation introduced by the Government to abolish ATSIC without an appropriate, alternative Indigenous representative body to replace it.

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